

# YALI SPEAKS

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM  
WORKBOOK



**YALINETWORK**

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**#YALISPEAKS**



U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE



## **YALISpeaks: Community Journalism Workbook**

Community journalism is defined as the gathering and reporting of news by everyday citizens rather than professional reporters, and without any news media organizational ties. Community journalists often gather information that is overlooked by mainstream sources because it is not deemed sufficiently “newsworthy.” They can be anyone producing a message and distilling it for interested audiences. A community journalist can convey stories in a variety of media — print, video, photographs or sound — depending on the author’s skill set and preferences. Community journalists also can distribute their work via social media, podcasts or blogs. This workbook will help you to find your niche and learn how to interview people for your stories. It also will offer tips for reporting stories responsibly and give you ideas on how to share your stories with your audience.

## Find Your Niche

For reporters, this is called a “beat,” or a focus of interest that they consistently write about. Use the questions below to help you get started.

- 1. What interests you? What are the topics that pique your curiosity?** Spend some time thinking about the subjects that interest you and that you are passionate about. Brainstorm a list of possible topics:  
(Example: Topic: Neighborhood safety)

Topic 1. \_\_\_\_\_

Topic 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Topic 3. \_\_\_\_\_

Topic 4. \_\_\_\_\_

Topic 5. \_\_\_\_\_

- 2. Use questions to focus your topic.** List possible questions about your topic you might wish your research to focus on. Continuing with the model topic above, below are some examples of how you can answer these questions once you have chosen your topic.

Who? (Example: Who is affected by an unsafe neighborhood? The people in the neighborhood.)

\_\_\_\_\_

What? (Example: What is the issue? Loud noises at night.)

\_\_\_\_\_

Where? (Example: Where is this happening? In my community.)

\_\_\_\_\_

Why? (Example: Why is this important? It's disruptive to the peace and, possibly, to the safety of the community.)

\_\_\_\_\_

When? (Example: When is this happening? Late at night; typically, after dark.)

\_\_\_\_\_

How? (Example: How does this affect the neighborhood? Disrupts the peace, and, possibly, the safety of neighborhood residents.)

\_\_\_\_\_

- 3. What is happening within your community related to these topics?** More importantly, what is happening in your community that fits the interests you've just discovered above?
- 4. What research exists on the topic you've chosen?** Search online. Do a quick search for books, scholarly articles and other resources that relate to the topics on your list. Write down the resources you find for each of your topics.

Topic 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources I found on Topic 1:

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Topic 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources I found on Topic 2:

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Topic 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources I found on Topic 3:

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Topic 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources I found on Topic 4:

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Topic 5: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources I found on Topic 5:

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Now, choose one topic from the list above. State your topic in the form of a question or problem to be solved, and write it below. Expanding upon the example used above, the question might be, "What are the late-night noises happening in town and how do they affect the residents of the neighborhood?"

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## Prepare and Interview

Now that you have chosen and researched your topic, you will need to interview subject-matter experts and people affected by the topic, also called sources. In journalism, a source can be broadly defined as a person who contributes to a piece of reporting. Be sure to use the source's full name, along with qualifiers that reference their expertise or proximity to the topic.

Here are some helpful tips for interviewing sources for your story:

### 1. Research, research, research.

In the previous section, you completed research to arrive at your topic question, so make sure that the questions you ask your sources reflect the research that you've done. You will also want to use your research time to ensure that your sources are credible and reliable. You will find great tips for doing this [here](#).

### 2. Determine your goal for the interview.

Are you looking to obtain certain information, looking for contextual information, or just seeking to learn more about the topic?

### 3. Create questions based on the information you would like to obtain.

Read over your research and compile a list of questions. These questions can be general (example: "Tell me about your work.") or specific (example: "Where were you when this event occurred?"). Make sure that the questions cannot be answered with a simple yes or no.

### 4. Contact the person you wish to interview.

Determine who would be a good contact to interview for your story. Contact them (email, call or direct message) to schedule a time to speak. Remember: This is the beginning, hopefully, of a relationship. [Here](#) are some tips for cultivating, developing and engaging sources.

### 5. Be prepared.

Have all the tools you will need to complete the interview in easy reach (example: laptop, notebook, pencil, recording device, phone, etc.).

### 6. Ask.

As with any conversation, if anything is unclear, ask! It is normal for things to be misinterpreted in a conversation, so be sure to ask for clarity if there's something you do not understand.

### 7. Relax.

Remember that while it is not a casual conversation, the interview is still a conversation. Allow time for the person to expand on their answers and listen carefully to their answers. Each question should lead naturally into the next.

## Determine Your Audience

Now that you've interviewed your sources and those affected by the story, you'll want to determine your audience. Determining your audience will help you in crafting your story and deciding the type of story structure you'd like to use. Ask yourself the questions below to get started:

### 1. Who are the readers, listeners or viewers?

You can start by thinking about demographics (examples: age, gender, education).

### 2. What does your target audience know or think they know about your topic?

To help yourself answer this question, ask yourself the following, "What is the probable source of their knowledge? Is it a direct experience or an observation? Will my readers react positively or negatively toward my subject?"

### 3. What does my target audience expect from my story?

Decide what your audience should expect to learn or gain by reading your story.

### 4. How can I interest my audience in the story that I'm telling?

If your audience is hostile toward your subject, decide how you can convince them to give your writing a fair reading. If your audience is sympathetic, decide how you can fulfill and enhance their expectations. If your audience is neutral, decide how you can catch and hold on to their attention. The next section of this workbook will help to engage your audience.

### 5. How can I make my story easy for the audience to understand?

Decide how your story should be organized to help your audience see your purpose. Figure out how you'd like your audience to follow your thinking and decide what markers you will use to organize your story. Finally, decide what and how many examples your audience will need to understand your general statements.

### 6. How will my audience access the story?

# Tell an Engaging Story

Now that you've determined your audience, you'll want to catch and keep their interest in your story. It is important to remember that your storytelling should excite and inform while also reflecting your personality and style. Here are a few tips for sharing a story effectively and engagingly:

## 1. Choose a clear central message.

A great story usually progresses toward a central moral or message. When crafting a story, you should have a definite idea of what you're building toward. If your story has a strong moral component, you'll want to guide listeners or readers to that message. If you're telling a funny story, you might build toward a twist that will leave your audience laughing. If you're telling an engaging story, try to increase the dramatic tension and suspense right up until the climax of your narrative. Regardless of the story type, it's important to be very clear on the central theme or plot point that you are building your story around.

## 2. Embrace conflict (if it exists).

Great storytellers craft narratives that have all sorts of obstacles and hardships strewn in the path of their main characters. Compelling plots are built on conflict, and you can embrace conflict and drama to become a better storyteller.

## 3. Have a clear structure.

While there are many different ways to structure a story, a story must have a beginning, middle and end. A successful story will start with an inciting incident, lead into rising action, build to a climax, and ultimately settle into a satisfying resolution.

## 4. Mine your personal experiences.

Think about important experiences in your real life and how you might be able to craft them into narratives. Your life experience can include many things such as age, gender, upbringing, where you are from, any challenges that you've faced, and more.

## 5. Connect with your audience.

Great storytelling requires you to connect with your audience, but much of how you captivate your audience depends on the mode of storytelling you're using. We fill in details of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. We paint the picture of the setting, time and feelings of the story with descriptive words. For example, if you're recording a podcast, the intonation of your voice and the emotions you're able to convey will be important tools in telling your story.

## Practice Your Storytelling

The best way to become a great storyteller is to practice. Use the activity below to help you to get comfortable with the storytelling process and the type of storytelling you'd like to do.

### Activity

Think of a personal experience. It can be embarrassing or funny, or something that just happened (such as going down a new street). Think about the series of events and what makes the story interesting. Then, outline the story from beginning to middle to end, adding in details that will help the audience to experience the situation from your perspective. Use descriptive words or phrases that will help them to connect with the experience.

This activity can be oral, written, or videoed. When practicing storytelling methods that rely on tone of voice or visual cues, be sure to make notes of where to change your voice or facial expressions to accurately communicate what you want the audience to feel in that moment.

## What's Next?

### Watch

To learn more about community journalism and how to be a responsible community journalist, watch the three-part YALI course.

### Gather

Use the tools from the YALISpeaks campaign and the skills you've learned in this workbook to start your first story.

### Report

Reflect on how best to communicate your story with your audience. Find the medium that works best for you and start storytelling!

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